

LBUSD Up To 778 Potential Layoffs

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It was another morose meeting for the Long Beach Unified School District Board of Education on Tuesday as the decision was made to increase the number of layoffs from 429 to 778 employees and cut another \$24.4 million.

“As abhorrent as I feel about these cuts, I know they are necessary,” said John McGinnis, board member. “There isn’t a single cut here that can be looked at favorably.”

Tuesday’s budget cuts were preceded by the board’s decision two weeks ago to slash more than \$26 million and therefore lay off 429 teachers, increase class sizes and close two elementary schools: Burroughs and Buffum.

All this is on top of \$170 million in cuts LBUSD has made in the past three years from a roughly \$700 million annual operating budget.

The school district has been preparing for a worst-case scenario, which could mean cutting \$155 million in the next two years. That number could be decreased to about \$52 million — and some of the employees receiving pink slips next month may be rehired — if voters approve Gov. Jerry Brown’s ballot measure to continue certain temporary tax increases (that election has yet to be scheduled).

This latest round of cuts means middle school sports will be suspended and many schools will lose some of their librarians, health teachers, music teachers, nurses, counselors, assistant principals and more. LBUSD’s Pregnant Minor Program is being eliminated, and those students instead will be referred to other programs.

Among the students, parents and teachers who overflowed the board room were several health educators, including Joseph Lopez-Clark from Poly High School.

“Health should be our biggest priority,” he said. “We are developing healthy, productive individuals for life... I am here to save students’ lives.”

Lopez-Clark said the lessons learned in health class are more important than teaching the students about mitochondria and cytoplasm. He said health is something that impacts daily life and diminishes teenage pregnancies and drug use.

Reductions at the district’s central office, which handles the behind-the-scenes school operations, make up \$1.1 million of the \$24.4 million in cuts. A total of \$8.5 million central office cuts are being considered.

“We are trying to keep these cuts out of the classroom as much as possible, but almost no corner is left uncut at this point,” said Chris Eftychiou, district spokesman.

Details about the central office reductions will be brought to the board at its next meeting. Eftychiou said bus transportation cuts are expected to make up a large part of the central office reductions.

Another \$7.6 million in budget “sweeps” were approved by the board, which will mean that unspent money in some school programs or reductions within programs and the central office will be reallocated to the district’s general fund.

One program severely impacted by the sweeps is adult education. The Adult School will lose about half of its teachers, more than 30 positions. Superintendent Chris Steinhauser said the adult education program would be modified so that the adult students will not be mixed with high school students who are making up credits.

“We have to think differently and take this crisis as an opportunity,” Steinhauser said.